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Buddhaghosa dives right into his chapter on the sublime attitudes with practical instructions for lovingkindness. The content of this experience is friendly good will—that is, one longs for others to be happy. As we will see with all of the sublime attitudes, the attitude must be directed toward a specific someone, a living flesh-and-blood person toward whom you can get the emotion flowing. There is nothing abstract about this practice: it involves real emotions toward specific beings (“beings” is mentioned advisedly, as it is not just humans toward whom we will want to feel universal friendliness).

You’ll want to start where it is easy and the emotion comes naturally. We will see that

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Buddhaghosa does not think that you should start with enemies or even neutrals, because feeling lovingkindness toward them is just too hard at first. Instead, you should start by feeling lovingkindness toward yourself since it is very easy to long for your own happiness. The idea is to get kindness flowing, for a mind full of kindness can't at the same time hold hate or anger. There may also be deeper psychological truth in his insisting, against possible detractors, on starting with loving yourself. He perceives that those who hate themselves can never truly love another. It may be that much hatred, cruelty, and apathy are, at bottom, the result of self-loathing.

In any case, you cannot get far in the meditation practice simply by flooding yourself with friendly thoughts, so you learn to gradually extend them to others—first a dear one, then one for whom you have only neutral feelings (per-

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haps a mere acquaintance), then a hostile person. Of course, it is at the stage of contemplating the hostile person—someone either you dislike or who dislikes you—that things get sticky. Interestingly, in Pali, the word for anger and hatred (dosa) is the same, a point itself worth reflecting on. It is a deeply unpleasant experience that by its very nature harms both you and others.⁵

Buddhists do not think that there is any context in which anger is a good or helpful thing (a view quite different from many modern people who think that anger is justified, inevitable, and can even helpfully prompt action toward a righteous cause). Buddhists take the ferocity of anger to entail a lack of control conducive to harmful action; or, if it is the simmering type of anger, it quietly corrodes one's inner peace, clear vision, and basic decency. It should be combated with its opposites, either the friendly good will of

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lovingkindness, or patience, the ability to endure harm from others without getting angry.

As you go deeper into this practice examining more and more closely your feelings toward particular others, it is likely that you will come upon a person toward whom—when you reflect on them—anger, resentment, or hostility flares up. Most of the lovingkindness practice is a series of techniques for removing this anger so that you can eventually break down all barriers and feel universal lovingkindness toward everyone equally.

These techniques are a kind of cognitive or affective therapy that involves transforming one's negative emotional biases into more positive orientations. They also might be seen as a kind of philosophical therapy of attending to the world more justly and lovingly, and thus more freely, as philosopher Iris Murdoch also suggests.⁶ Ideally,

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the practitioner is engaging these practices daily, over a long period of time, to bring about a subtle psychological refashioning. The practices shift mood and perspective by undermining our usual fixed and tenacious sense of grievance, resentment, and disaffection.

And so you learn to change the way you think and feel about the person by various strategies ranging from reproaching yourself for nourishing an anger that only makes you upset to realizing that you are only gratifying your enemy by permitting your anger to make you ugly. As a good Buddhist—Buddhaghosa is addressing an in-house audience—you should, he thinks, be moved by the Buddha’s own words and example. So another technique is to consider the extraordinary patience the Buddha practiced as a bodhisatta, that is, in his long run-up in previous lives to becoming the Buddha. In this technique you

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are to consider the extraordinary—and perhaps over-the-top—stories of his astonishing patience and lack of anger in these previous lives. Holding up the Bodhisatta as an ideal against which to measure your own petty grievances can shake you out of stubbornly nurturing your anger.

Buddhaghosa thinks that because we have been habituated to anger and hatred for so long, and because what works for some of us may not work for others, many techniques should be offered. If one technique fails or seems unrealistic, he offers another one following it. Some of these involve imaginative exercises that depend on Buddhist ideas of karma and rebirth. When I consider the workings of karma, where actions have previous conditions and will issue in future results, I realize that my enemy and I are both conditioned by our past actions and will be held to account for our present and future actions.

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This can caution me about my own reactions, even while it reminds me that my enemies will experience the effects of their own actions. They will be dealt with justly without need for my angry feelings of reprisal.

The idea of rebirth too can prompt a shift in perspective: If the doctrine of rebirth is true and we have all been reborn infinitely in the past in all manner of different relationships with one another, then it is very possible that my current enemy was in a past life my mother. In that life, she tenderly nourished and cared for me. Buddhaghosa expounds on the tender acts of care we receive as infants to help shift our mood and perspective. Reflecting on my own vulnerability and how I was once the recipient of loving care—perhaps by this same person in a distant life—I realize that it can only be churlish for me to continue harboring hate toward them now.

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Other techniques that may need some explanation take a different tack by deploying Buddhist ideas of “no self” to dismantle anger.⁷ Persons are real up to a point, but on closer analysis they are only a collection of constantly changing momentary events. So the person I am angry with now is not the “same” person who initially caused me distress. Like me, they are changing all the time, and like me, they are conditioned by a complex set of processes that I can disaggregate and analyze. In fact, looking for the stable, unchanging essence of this person on which to target my anger (and anger always wants a target), I find that they dissolve into these changing parts. Toward whom, toward what, am I actually angry?

If all else fails, you should give the person a gift. Generosity to your enemy can almost magically wipe away anger on both sides.

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The techniques call on us to consider why we want to hold on to these painful experiences and to think that maybe we would be happier and better off without them. And our wishing that the other be happy and friendly will likely affect them as well, bringing about a better overall state of affairs for us all.

Once you have flooded yourself, your dear ones, mere acquaintances, and enemies with lovingkindness, you can reach “full absorption” in the practice, which is indicated by your having “broken down barriers”: only when you can see no difference in your feelings for any of these four have you achieved universal love.

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Mettā

[1] Anussatikammaṭṭhānānantaraṃ uddiṭṭhesu
pana mettā karuṇā muditā upekkhāti imesu catū-
su brahmavihāresu mettāṃ bhāvetukāmena tāva
ādikammikena yogāvacarena upacchinnapalibod-
hena gahitakammaṭṭhānena bhattakiccaṃ katvā
bhattasammadaṃ paṭivinodetvā vivitte padese
supaññatte āsane sukhanisinnena ādito tāva dose
ādīnavo khantiyañca ānisaṃso paccavekkhitabbo.⁸

Kasmā? Imāya hi bhāvanāya doso pahātab-
bo, khanti adhigantabbā. Na ca sakkā kiñci
adiṭṭhādīnavaṃ pahātuṃ, aviditānisaṃsaṃ vā
adhigantuṃ. Tasmā duṭṭho kho, āvuso, dosena

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Lovingkindness

[1] The four sublime attitudes—lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—are mentioned immediately following the meditation on the recollections. To start with, the beginning meditator who wants to practice lovingkindness should finish their duties and only then take up the meditation on this topic. After having a meal and dispelling any post-meal sleepiness, get seated comfortably on a well-prepared seat in a secluded place. First, contemplate the dangers of anger and hatred and the benefits of patience.

Why do this? This practice banishes anger and generates patience. And you cannot abandon dangers of which you are not aware or attain benefits of which you are ignorant. Therefore,

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abhibhūto pariyādiṇṇacitto pāṇampi han-
atītiādīnaṃ vasena dose ādīnavo daṭṭhabbo.

Khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā, nibbānaṃ
paramaṃ vadanti buddhā.

Khantibalaṃ balānīkaṃ, tamahaṃ brūmi
brāhmaṇaṃ.

Khantā bhiiyo na vijjatītiādīnaṃ vasena khan-
tiyaṃ ānisaṃso veditabbo.

Athevaṃ diṭṭhādīnavato dosato cittaṃ vivecanat-
thāya, viditānisaṃsāya ca khantiyā saṃyojanat-
thāya mettābhāvanā ārabhitabbā.

[2] Ārabhantena ca āditova puggalabhedo
jānitabbo imesu puggalesu mettā paṭhamam na¹¹

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teachings such as “Friends, an angry person overcome and obsessed with hatred harms living beings” reveal the dangers of anger and the benefit of patience.

The buddhas say that patience is the highest endurance.

And that nirvana is supreme.

I call anyone whose real strength is the power of patience a brahmin.⁹

There is nothing greater than patience.¹⁰

Therefore, for the sake of removing hate from the mind—its danger now seen—and connecting it to patience—its benefit now known—take up the practice of lovingkindness.

[2] Now, at the very beginning, one starting out should recognize that there are different

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bhāvetabbā, imesu neva bhāvetabbā ti. Ayañhi mettā appiyapuggale, atippiyasahāyake, majjhatte, verīpuggaleti imesu catūsu paṭhamaṃ na bhāvetabbā. Liṅgavisabhāge odhiso na bhāvetabbā. Kālakate na bhāvetabbāva.

Kimkāraṇā appiyādīsu paṭhamaṃ na bhāvetabbā? Appiyaṃ hi piyaṭṭhāne ṭhapento kilamati. Atippiyasahāyakaṃ majjhataṭṭhāne ṭhapento kilamati, appamattakepi cassa dukkhe uppanne ārodanākārappatto viya hoti. Majjhataṃ garuṭṭhāne ca piyaṭṭhāne ca ṭhapento kilamati. Verimanussarato kodho uppajjati, tasmā appiyādīsu paṭhamaṃ na bhāvetabbā.

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classes of persons and that at first lovingkindness should be cultivated toward certain people and not toward others. At the beginning, lovingkindness should not be practiced toward these four: someone one dislikes, a dear friend, a person toward whom one feels neutral, and a hostile person. And it should not be practiced toward someone of the opposite sex or someone who has died.

Why should lovingkindness meditation not be practiced at first toward these kinds of people, the disliked person and the others? It is exhausting to put someone one dislikes in the position of someone dear. Placing a dear friend in the place of a mere acquaintance is also exhausting and if they incur even a trifling sorrow, one can be moved to tears. To put a mere acquaintance in the place of a teacher or a dear friend is also

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Liṅgavisabhāge pana tameva ārabhha odhiso bhāventassa rāgo uppajjati. Aññataro kira amaccaputto kulūpakattheraṃ pucchi bhante, kassa mettā bhāvetabbā ti? Thero piyapuggale ti āha. Tassa attano bhariyā piyā hoti. So tassā mettaṃ bhāvento sabbarattiṃ bhittiyuddhamakāsi. Tasmā liṅgavisabhāge odhiso na bhāvetabbā.

Kālakate pana bhāvento neva appanaṃ, na upacāraṃ pāpuṇāti. Aññataro kira daharabhikkhu ācariyaṃ ārabhha mettaṃ ārabhi. Tassa mettā nappavattati. So mahātherassa santikaṃ gantvā

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exhausting. And anger flares up when one thinks about a hostile person. So at first do not practice this meditation toward these people.

And passion is aroused when practicing this meditation toward a person of the opposite sex. It is said that there was once a monk associated with a certain household who was asked by a friend's son, "Sir, toward whom should lovingkindness be practiced?" The monk replied, "Toward a person who is dear." The man's own wife was dear to him. Practicing lovingkindness toward her, he spent the night beating his head against the wall. This is why it should not be practiced toward a person of the opposite sex.

And one practicing specifically for someone deceased achieves neither preliminary nor full meditative absorption. It seems that a certain young monk undertook lovingkindness directed

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bhante, paṇḍava me mettājhānasamāpatti, na ca naṃ samāpajjitum sakkomi, kiṃ nu kho kāraṇanti āha. Thero nimittaṃ, āvuso, gavesāhīti āha. So gavesanto ācariyassa matabhāvaṃ ñatvā aññaṃ ārabha mettāyanto samāpattiṃ appesi. Tasmā kālakate na bhāvetabbāva.

[3] Sabbapaṭhamam pana ahaṃ sukhito homi niddukkho ti vā, avero abyāpajjo anīgho sukhī atānaṃ pariharāmīti vā evaṃ punappunaṃ attaniyeva bhāvetabbā.

Evam sante yaṃ vibhaṅge vuttaṃ

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toward his teacher. But his lovingkindness did not advance. So he approached an eminent monk and reported, “Sir, I am very well-versed in practicing deep concentration on lovingkindness, but I am not able to enter into it. Why is this?” The monk replied, “Seek out the mental object of the meditation, friend.” Seeking him out, he realized that his teacher had died, and so he generated lovingkindness toward someone else and achieved it. This shows that it cannot be practiced toward someone who has died.

[3] So develop it first aimed specifically toward yourself, again and again, in this way: “May I be happy and free of suffering!” or “Let me be friendly, without ill will, untroubled, and happy!”

But, one might think, surely this contradicts what is said in the texts. The *Book of Analysis* says:

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Kathañca bhikkhu mettāsaḥagatena cetasā
ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati? Seyyathāpi nāma
ekaṃ puggalaṃ piyaṃ manāpaṃ disvā mettāy-
eyya, evameva sabbe satte mettāya pharatīti.

Yañca paṭisambhidāyaṃ

Katamehi pañcahākārehi anodhisopparaṇā
mettā cetovimutti bhāvetabbā, sabbe sattā
averā hontu abyāpajjā anīghā sukhī attānaṃ
pariharantu. Sabbe pāṇā... sabbe bhūtā...
sabbe puggalā... sabbe attabhāva-pariyāpannā
averā abyāpajjā anīghā sukhī attānaṃ pariha-
rantū ti ādi

Vuttaṃ. Yañca mettāsutte

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And how does a monk live flooding one direction with a mind full of lovingkindness? Imagine how one would feel lovingkindness upon seeing a dear and likable person. Just like that one floods all beings with lovingkindness.¹²

And the *Treatise on Analytic Knowledge* says:

What are the five ways that freedom of the loving mind is to be practiced universally?¹³ First, may all *beings* go about friendly, without ill will, untroubled, and happy! Second, may all *living creatures*; third, all *who exist*; fourth, all *people*; and five, all *individuals* be friendly, without ill will, untroubled, and happy!¹⁴

And the “Teaching on Lovingkindness” says:

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Sukhinova khemino hontu,
Sabbasattā bhavantu sukhitattātiādi.

Vuttaṃ, taṃ virujjhati.

Na hi tattha attani bhāvanā vuttāti ce. Tañca na virujjhati. Kasmā? Tañhi appanāvasena vuttaṃ. Idaṃ sakkebhāvasena. Sacepi hi vassasattaṃ vassasahassaṃ vā ahaṃ sukhito homītiādinā nayena attani mettaṃ bhāveti, nevassa appanā uppajjati. Ahaṃ sukhito homīti bhāvayato pana yathā ahaṃ sukhakāmo dukkhapaṭikkūlo jīvitukāmo amaritukāmo ca, evaṃ aññepi sattāti attānaṃ sakkehiṃ katvā aññasattesu hitasukhakāmatā uppajjati.

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May all beings be happy and peaceful!

May they be at ease!¹⁵

Nowhere is it said that this meditation is to be done toward oneself.

But in fact, this does not contradict the texts. Why not? These statements concern full absorption. But here we are concerned with just directly experiencing lovingkindness. True, even if one were to say “May I be happy” for a hundred or a thousand years with this method of practicing lovingkindness toward oneself, full absorption would never arise. But by practicing “May I be happy,” one generates longing for the well-being and happiness of other beings by first directly experiencing it for oneself. For just as I wish for happiness and to avoid suffering, and I wish to live and not to die, so too do other beings.

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Bhagavatāpi—

Sabbā disā anuparigamma cetasā,
Nevajjhagā piyataramattanā kvaci;
Evaṃ piyo puthu attā paresaṃ,
Tasmā na hiṃse paramattakāmoti.
vadatā ayaṃ nayo dassito.

[4] Tasmā sakkebhāvatthaṃ paṭhamaṃ at-
tānaṃ mettāya pharivā tadanantaraṃ sukhappa-
vattanatthaṃ yvāyaṃ piyo manāpo garu bhāvanīyo
ācariyo vā ācariyamatto vā upajjhāyo vā upajjhāya-
matto vā tassa dānapiyavacanādīni piyamanāpat-
takāraṇāni silasutādīni garubhāvanīyattakāraṇāni
ca anussarivā esa sappuriso sukhī hotu niddukkho
tiādīnā nayena mettā bhāvetabbā.

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This interpretation is confirmed by the Buddha's statements such as this:

Casting around with the mind in every
direction,
no one finds anyone more dear than oneself.
Each holds their own self most dear.
And so, loving oneself, one does not harm
others.¹⁶

[4] Now, having first flooded yourself with lovingkindness in order to experience it directly, and so that you may proceed easily and continuously, recollect someone dear and likable, or a teacher, someone respected, a religious leader or one of similar status, or a mentor or someone like a mentor. And in the case of the dear and likable person, recall such things as their kind

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Evarūpe ca puggale kāmaṃ appanā sampajjati, iminā pana bhikkhunā tāvatakeneva tuṭṭhiṃ anāpajjitvā sīmāsambhedaṃ kattukāmena tadanantaraṃ atippiyasahāyake, atippiyasahāyakato majjhatte, majjhattato verīpuggale mettā bhāvetabbā. Bhāventena ca ekekasmiṃ koṭṭhāse muduṃ kammaniyaṃ cittaṃ katvā tadanantare tadanantare upasaṃharitabbaṃ.

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words and generosity and your own considerate actions toward them. In the case of one respected and honored, recall such things as their virtue and learning and your own deferential actions toward them. And in this way, practice loving-kindness: “May this good person be happy and free of suffering!”

Full absorption easily arises when directed toward such a person. But the monastic practitioner not satisfied with only this and who also wants to break down barriers should immediately turn to practicing lovingkindness toward the very dear friend, and after the very dear friend, the mere acquaintance, and after the mere acquaintance, the hostile person. Practicing toward persons in each category one after the other, open and soften your heart toward each before taking up the next.

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Yassa pana verīpuggalo vā natthi, mahāpurisa-jātikattā vā anattamaṃ karontepi pare verisaññāva nuppajjati, tena majjhatte me mettacittamaṃ kammaniyamaṃ jātamaṃ, idāni maṃ verimhi upasaṃharāmīti byāpārova na kātabbo. Yassa pana atthi, taṃ sandhāya vuttaṃ majjhattato verīpuggale mettā bhāvetabbāti.

[5] Sace panassa verimhi cittamupasaṃharato tena katāparādhānussaraṇena paṭighamuppajjati, athānena purimapuggalesu yattha katthaci punappunamaṃ mettaṃ samāpajjitvā vuṭṭhahitvā

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But it may be that you do not know any hostile people, either because you are a truly great person or because you do not perceive hostility in others even when they have done you harm. In this case, you may disregard this step: “Now that the loving mind has grown supple toward the mere acquaintance, let me turn to the hostile person.” For it is for those who do have one that it is instructed that “after the mere acquaintance, lovingkindness should be practiced toward the hostile person.”

Techniques for Dispelling Anger and Hate

[5] But if anger arises when turning the mind to an enemy because you keep remembering the wrongs they have done, then repeatedly go back to lovingkindness toward any of the earlier

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punappunaṃ taṃ puggalaṃ mettāyantena
paṭighaṃ vinodetabbaṃ.

Sace evampi vāyamato na nibbāti, atha

Kakacūpamaovāda-ādīnaṃ anusārato;
Paṭighassa pahānāya, ghaṭitabbaṃ
punappunaṃ.

Tañca kho iminā ākārena attānaṃ ovađanteneva
are kujjhanapurisa, nanu vuttaṃ bhagavatā. Ubh-
atodaṇḍakena cepi, bhikkhave, kakacena corā oc-
arakā aṅgamaṅgāni okanteyyumaṃ, tatrāpi yo mano
padoseyya. Na me so tena sāsana-karo ti ca

Tasseva tena pāpiyo, yo kuddhaṃ
paṭikujjhati;